

WELCOME TO WEEK 34 OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF LA JOLLA'S AT HOME WORSHIP EXPERIENCE. PLEASE FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS IN THIS GUIDE AND UTILIZE THE AUDIO ATTACHMENTS SENT TO YOU IN THE ACCOMPANYING EMAIL TO ASSIST IN YOUR WORSHIP EXPERIENCE. PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH FEEDBACK IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS. YOU CAN REACH US AT PASTOR@LAJOLLAUCC.ORG. THIS IS CHURCH. THIS IS HOLY. THIS IS HOW WE RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES OF OUR DAY.

Today's At Home Worship experience is led by Rev. John Benbow, our church's Minister Emeritus. It comes to you on November 1, a day after Reformation/Reconciliation Day, the modern recollection of Martin Luther's nailing his 95 Theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, commonly thought to be the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. The word "Reconciliation" in that designation refers to the work that still lies ahead for Christian churches: to overcome our divisions, and to build the new, strong and unified universal Church which will serve its participants and the human community in new ways.

November 1 is also just 2 days before a major event in our life as citizens of the United States. What has been called the most consequential election in our history will determine the future course of our nation. It will take place in the midst of unprecedented partisan divisions, and also in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis that has affected all of us and nearly every person in the world.

Finally, it is also the traditional All Saints Day, when we recall the generations of people through the centuries who have sought to be the people of God in the service of mankind.

May the coincidence of these three things prepare our hearts and minds to worship God in Spirit and in truth.

THIS WILL BE VERY MUCH UNLIKE WHAT YOU ARE USED TO IN CHURCH. THAT IS ON PURPOSE. THIS IS SOMETHING NEW AND BECAUSE OF THAT WE'VE TAKEN LIBERTIES TO PROVIDE YOU WITH SOMETHING TOTALLY DIFFERENT. ENJOY MUSICAL SELECTIONS YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE HEARD AT CHURCH BEFORE AND A MESSAGE UNLIKE THAT WHICH IS DELIVERED FROM THE PULPIT. CONSIDER IT AN ADVENTURE. YES, YOU ARE MAKING HISTORY TODAY.

PLEASE FIND A COMFORTABLE AND COMFORTING PLACE IN YOUR HOME OR SOMEWHERE ELSE YOU FEEL SAFE. GET COMFORTABLE, POUR YOURSELF A GLASS OF SOMETHING SOOTHING AND ENJOY THIS EXPERIMENT IN WORSHIP....

WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS AND MINDS FOR WORSHIP

ENJOY MATTHIAS'S ORGAN SOLO BY CLICKING ON THE AUDIO FILE MARKED "AUDIO FILE 1"

FINDING GOD IN VOICE

ENJOY BRONWYN'S SOLO BY CLICKING ON THE AUDIO FILE MARKED "AUDIO FILE 2" IN THE EMAIL.

WE HEAR FROM SCRIPTURE...

Matthew 6:25—34

FOR TODAY'S SCRIPTURE, PLEASE CLICK ON THIS LINK or copy it into your browser:

<https://youtu.be/TvHqHzDuDcw>

A MESSAGE TO REFLECT ON

Living with Uncertainty

Rev. John Benbow

As I was beginning the work that led to this meditation, we received a bulky envelope in the mail. It came from our niece Susan, who is a photographer in Maine. You may remember the Maine Road Trip I included in the Home Worship Kit several weeks ago. We knew immediately what the envelope contained: Susan's annual calendar of Maine photographs, taking us month by month from snowy woods to sunny seacoasts, and back again to the stark beauty of winter.

The picture Susan chose for the calendar's cover is an autumn scene. Many golden oak leaves, red maple leaves and yellow birch leaves are still on the trees, though the ground is also covered with them. A country road and a stone fence curve slowly into the background. A morning mist, dappled in places by sunshine, makes the whole scene fade the farther you look down the road, so that somewhere beyond the curve in the road, it fades into mist and mystery. The picture is titled "Uncertain Destination."

I knew immediately I'd have to begin this meditation with that picture in our minds. That's where we are right now, on the first day of November in 2020: on a winding road with an uncertain destination. Together we've lived through nearly nine months of the Covid-19 pandemic, that unexpected and unwelcome intrusion into the life of the world that has led to millions of infections and deaths on every continent except Antarctica. Together we've lived through the first surge of the illness in the US, and then the second surge; and now it appears that there will be a third surge, with God knows how many more infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

We're on a winding road with an uncertain destination. Few of us would claim that where we are is a pretty picture. Only an incurable optimist would say things are looking up, the shaky world economy is almost on its feet again, vaccines are about to be ready, treatments that avert some deaths are here. We're still on a road with an uncertain destination, and our task for now is to live with uncertainty, to live without knowing for sure what lies ahead of us.

Living with uncertainty: that's our task for the present, and maybe for months or even years to come. One friend of mine says we may be living with Covid and its uncertainties for the rest of our lives. We're living with the uncertainty of so many of us unemployed, so many jobs perhaps never to return, so many children deprived of the education they deserve, and even without what social planners call "food security," with over 30% of US families who have small children unsure of how they'll pay for food in the months to come, and some facing eviction from their homes as well.

And we have to add to that the uncertainty of our political institutions, which is shown in the distrust, for many, of all three branches of our government, and has found its uncertain focus in the process of electing our leaders. Some 80% of us, according to one poll, assert that this election is the most consequential one in our lifetime—though, of course, we’re radically divided on party lines as to what its outcome ought to be.

Google says there have been millions of searches, these past few months, using the words “uncertain times.” More and more of us are searching, now, for ways to live with uncertainty. It’s as if we’re on a winding road with an uncertain destination.

But we’re on that road together. Being together may be the first step toward learning to live with the uncertainty that is our lot. We’re in this thing together. We’re not alone. We have our families, our friends, our churches, our communities alongside of us on the journey. We have scientists and physicians who are devoting lifetimes of research and practice to unlock the secrets of the coronavirus. We have nurses and caregivers and ambulance drivers, the front lines of giving care to those who are infected with the virus. And despite our distrust of them, we have policy makers and politicians who seek the well-being of all of us. We have teachers who improvise creative ways for children to learn and even to thrive in this pandemic year. We are not alone.

And yet some aspects of living with uncertainty belong to each of us alone. Though we’re in it together, we’re in it as individual members of the community. It’s like those words of the old spiritual: you must walk this lonesome valley, you have to walk it by yourself. That is to say, we each of us experience the stress and burden of uncertainty, perhaps more now than at any time in our lives. The caregivers—doctors and nurses and hospital workers—experience more than any of us the valley that must be walked alone; and they, more than anyone, bear the burden of uncertainty. And the patients, especially those severely ill with Covid disease, have to face alone the misery and loneliness of their illness, often without even their closest family members able to visit them.

Reflecting on the way that each of us must live our lives in the uncertainty of these days, Steven Petrow wrote these words in a short NY Times essay:

“I wake up every day now with uncertainty, wondering what new and frightening updates there will be about the coronavirus pandemic, the protests, the climate and the economy. I read headlines about the pain and uncertainty of soaring jobless rates, the uncertain promise of a Covid-19 vaccine and the uncertainties surrounding the presidential election.”

He goes on to tell how he learned to live with the uncertainty of being diagnosed with a seemingly incurable cancer several years ago. He survived it, but only by living fully into the uncertainty, refusing to deny his situation, taking time to care for himself, taking time even to think of nothing but breathing quietly to keep from sinking into hopelessness. At the end of his essay, he quotes a friend who had to go through her husband’s terminal illness. She offered these words: “Uncertainty and unpredictability—suddenly and surprisingly—are where there’s an opening for hope.”

I think his words, and especially hers, can be a kind of signpost on our road through the next days, weeks and months. “Uncertainty and unpredictability...are where there’s an opening for hope.”

That’s what we seek and what we need on the misty, curving road to an uncertain destination: an opening for hope, a sunshine-dappled respite from the stress. Living with uncertainty may make us feel helpless, and helplessness too often draws us down into hopelessness. But the way to find the “opening for hope” is to care for ourselves and each other, to be grateful that we’re in this thing together.

It is not some magical escape, but a plain and simple fact: helplessness turns to hopelessness; to be hopeful again is to move from helplessness into helpfulness. “Take care of yourselves, and of each other,” the nightly newscaster tells us; and his may be the words we need to follow.

We’re on this road together, this journey with an uncertain destination. Yet uncertainty and unpredictability are where there’s an opening for hope. And being helpful is the way to be hopeful again. Take care of yourselves, and of each other.

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH CONTINUES....

YES, EVEN THOUGH WE AREN’T TOGETHER THE WORK OF THE CHURCH CONTINUES. WE MIGHT NOT BE PASSING A LITERAL OFFERING PLATE BUT WE ARE PASSING A VIRTUAL ONE. YOUR GIFTS AND TITHES ARE WHAT HAVE ALLOWED THIS CHURCH TO SEE THREE DIFFERENT CENTURIES. PLEASE CONSIDER PROVIDING YOUR OFFERING THROUGH THE FOLLOWING LINK:

https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=MHKJLYNRGPDUS&source=url

OR FEEL FREE TO DROP IT IN THE MAIL TO **1216 CAVE ST, LA JOLLA, CA 92037**. YES, WE WILL STILL CHECK THE MAIL!

WE PREPARE TO GO OUT INTO AN *UNCERTAIN* WORLD

PLEASE CLICK ON THE AUDIO FILE MARKED "AUDIO FILE 3" IN THE EMAIL TO ENJOY NATE HENRICHON'S TRUMPET POSTLUDE.

MAY THE GRACE OF **GOD**
WHICH IS BEYOND OUR
UNDERSTANDING, THE
LOVE OF **JESUS CHRIST**
WHICH IS BEYOND OUR
DESERVING, AND THE
POWER OF THE **HOLY**
SPIRIT BE WITH EACH OF
YOU BOTH NOW AND
FOREVERMORE. **AMEN**

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Matthias Kaeser, organ

Nate Henrichon, trumpets

Bronwyn Allen-Kaeser, office manager and soprano

Nina Gilbert, music director and pianist

Audio File 1: Johann Sebastian Bach, Toccata in D minor, BWV 565

Selected this week for two reasons: (1) Ceremonial and dignified—and familiar—as we approach election week; and (2) Halloween weekend: this Toccata has added atmosphere to horror movies since the days of silent films.

We thank Matthias for playing this on our church organ.

Audio File 2: *In Times of Great Decision*

Words by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, 2016; tune AURELIA by Samuel Sebastian Wesley, 1864.

We have discovered a marvelous resource for timely, topical new hymns, and expect to use more of them: <http://www.carolynshymns.com/>

Audio File 3: Georg Philipp Telemann, Concerto in B♭ for two trumpets

Transcribed by Roger Voisin from Telemann's *Tafelmusik* concerto for two horns, TWV 54:Es1, 1733.

Tafelmusik, or "Table Music," was commissioned by subscribers who wanted music played at their banquets.

For this technological adventure, Nate recorded himself playing both trumpet parts, and Nina edited everything together.